

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 25, 2005

To: Greg Carpenter

CC: Angela Reynolds, Craig Chalfant

From: Mercedes McLemore

Subject: Minutes from May 11, 2005 Los Cerritos Wetlands Meeting

Roll Call:

Attendees

City of Long Beach:

Greg Carpenter

Angela Reynolds

Craig Chalfant,

Mercedes McLemore

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER—6:15 pm

Review of Minutes from last meeting

Minutes Approved from April 13, 2005

Public Comments— Curtailed until June Meeting

Meeting Open for Staff Comments--NONE

Speaker Presentation:

Greg Carpenter provided the study group with an outline of the meeting agenda. The meeting would open with him summarizing the requested entitlements for the proposed Home Depot shopping center. Next, Angela Reynolds would discuss the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and answer any questions. And the Home Depot team would explain specific elements of the project and answer any questions.

Mr. Carpenter identified the project location as the point where the terminus of Loynes Drive and Studebaker meet. The site was originally used for oil tanks, and currently still serves as a power plant. The site is currently designated as General Industrial, and is part of SEADIP planning area. Therefore, a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) is required for the proposed commercial uses, in addition to Site Plan Review (SPR) and variance for a shortage of landscaping. Mr. Carpenter further explained the landscaping issue by stating that SEADIP requires 30% open space, and the applicant only provides 22%. The SEADIP design theme was intended to promote bikeways, walkways, and other usable open space. Due to the scale of the project, an EIR is required. Mr. Carpenter assured the group that there will be ample opportunity for the public to comment because such an extensive review and hearing process is required.

Ms. Reynolds introduced herself to the group as the Environmental Planning Officer, and moved on to talk about the EIR. The City issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) about a year ago when Home Depot came to the city as an applicant. She explained that the NOP, which is required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) was mailed to all neighborhood associations with a 30 day review period for comments. There was a scoping meeting at Kettering Elementary School where residents complained that the review period was not long enough. Therefore, a two-week extension was granted, and several hundreds more comments were submitted about the initial study. Ms. Reynolds stated that the environmental consultant then wrote a draft EIR based on these comments, which is currently in circulation. This draft EIR has been sent to Air Quality Management District (AQMD), Los Angeles County Public Works (LACPW), various neighborhood groups, and anyone who attended the scoping meeting and signed in. In total, approximately 300 notices were sent to inform people of the EIR availability. Ms. Reynolds said that it can be bought for \$40 (the reproduction cost only), and is also available online and at the local libraries. The official comment/review period began May 2, and will run until June 15. She said that comments could also be mailed to her directly at Angela_Reynolds@longbeach.gov. After the 45-day review period, there will be a "response to comments" period. Ms. Reynolds noted that any comments collected at this particular meeting would not be recorded, because comments need to be submitted in writing. There will be a Planning Commission study session on May 19, 2005 at 12:00 p.m. in Council Chambers. Ms. Reynolds stated that at this session she would further describe the project and, as well as any impacts that are significant, need to be mitigated, and cannot be mitigated. The Planning Commission will hear public comments, but these will only be documented if in writing. She went on to say that the City will accept all public comments, but respond only to the germane ones. If someone simply wants to voice their opinion regarding the project, it will be noted but not responded to in the Final EIR. Ms. Reynolds said that the Final EIR has a "Respond to Comments" section. The final EIR goes to the Planning Commission simultaneously with the entitlements (CUP, SPR, etc.) Upon hearing the EIR is certified, or not, depending on the Commission finding it acceptable. She said that after the EIR certification, the Commission will act on the entitlements. The City has roughly 6-8 weeks to respond to comments, but this time period varies depending on the amount of comments submitted. She told the group that a late August hearing date is predicted, but not guaranteed. However, notice of this meeting will be sent to anyone who submitted comments, and/or attended the scoping meeting. Ms. Reynolds went on to discuss the appeal process. After the Planning Commission meets and makes a determination, one can appeal to the City Council within 10 days of the Planning Commission hearing. Such appeals are free of charge. Mr. Carpenter then added that due to the project site's close proximity to waterways, it is also appealable to the California Coastal Commission. However, an appeal of that sort has to be relative to the project being consistent/inconsistent with the Local Coastal Plan. The City contracted with a firm called LSA to complete the EIR. Ms. Reynolds then introduced the group to Craig Chalfant, who is the Environmental Planner assigned to work with LSA on this project. When asked if the applicant had purchased the property, she responded yes. Ms. Reynolds then suggested that the group read the Executive Summary to see what impacts were found, and which ones cannot be mitigated below the threshold of significance. In this case, the Home Depot project has such impacts to areas such as air quality and traffic (to name a couple). Ms. Reynolds pointed out that the EIR is a disclosure document only, and ultimately goes to the a deciding body. After reading it, the deciding body will determine its adequacy, and whether the benefits of the project

will outweigh its burdens. If so then there will be a Statement of Overriding Considerations (SOC), or exception for the project, is made. According to Ms. Reynolds, several SOC's are required based on the finding of the Home Depot Project.

The next speaker was Marice (pronounced Mair-is) White, from Government Solutions. She introduced herself, as well as Stephanie Kyle, who is also from Government Solutions. Ms. White gave a PowerPoint presentation, and started by giving a summary of what is being proposed. According to Marice, the project site is 16.7 acres, possibly larger if one were to count the tank that will remain. The proposed project includes a Home Depot that is 140,000 square feet (30,000 square feet of which is the garden center), a restaurant, and neighborhood retail. Ms. White went on to show the group elevations of the proposed Home Depot, and stated that it will be conditioned not to allow any outdoor sales. After showing the site plan to the study group, she noted that it was a slightly revised site plan from the one originally submitted, and that it had not been studied from an EIR standpoint. In the revised plans, some of the retail originally proposed has been removed, and some repositioned. Ms. White stated that the site plan shown was not a final design, and that there were still other possibilities. Next, she described the proposed Home Depot as being more of a "design center," i.e. "hybrid" product type of store. It has been designed to attract interior designers more so than contractors, and so there are various product displays rather than the typical warehouse appearance that Home Depot usually has. According to Ms. White, the center will have a wetlands theme in the landscaping with native vegetation, an outdoor dining area, and a walking path along Studebaker.

After briefing the group on the details of the project, Ms. White began listing the benefits per PowerPoint presentation. They include the following:

- It will clean up an unsightly area by offering landscaping and architectural treatments;
- The area will have more amenities, such as dining and neighborhood services;
- It will cause an increase in sales tax to the City of Long Beach;
- It will cause an increase in tax revenue to the local schools;
- It meets the local demand for a closer home improvement and design center.

Next, Ms. White went on to describe the outstanding issues addressed in the EIR, beginning with the shortage of open space proposed. She opened by pointing out that the proposed Home Depot is the first project in SEADIP that is being held to the 30% standard. She also pointed out that the applicant has spent the last year trying to come up with alternative designs that would meet this standard. The solution that they thought of was to acquire the vacant parcel near 7th Street and Kettering. On this parcel, they are proposing providing a link to the existing trail at the Los Cerritos Channel, as well as a landscape buffer between 7th Street and Kettering School.

The next issue that she addressed was Traffic. Ms. White said that all project-impacted intersections can be mitigated for *weekday* conditions, but the Studebaker/22 westbound ramp cannot be mitigated at all. As for the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH)/2nd Street and PCH/7th Street intersections, these will be impacted on the weekends but not significantly. She told the group that the applicant plans to work with the City and CalTrans for traffic signal coordination. And although not mentioned in the EIR, studies

show an expected improvement of 3-5%, thus mitigating the project impact on weekend traffic. Ms. White went on to site page 4.11-24 of the EIR, which says the following:

“It should be noted that project-impacted intersection analyzed under the Intersection Capacity Utilization (ICU) methodology operate at acceptable Levels of Service (LOS) using Highway Capacity Manual (HCM) methodology...project-impacted intersections would operate at satisfactory levels of service.”

After citing this section, she commented that the second methodology yields different results than the first, but that the wait time is only greater by a few seconds. She also discussed the issue of cut-thru traffic, citing the EIR, which points out that this is not anticipated to be a problem (as is suspected by University Park Estates residents).

For the remaining issues, Ms. White stated the following:

- *Air Quality*—Basin is at a non-attainment status year round. All considered projects subject to environmental review would require the SOC, but the retail proposed is probably safer than the tanks.
- *Hazardous Materials*—After rough grading, a detailed soil investigation report is required by the City. Based on these results the applicant will agree to additional mitigation measures for handling on-site methane.
- *Noise*—The noise levels are expected to be lower than existing ambient noise, therefore Home Depot will not cause a significant impact. A 6' high plexiglass screen for sound attenuation will surround the outdoor eating area.
- *Light and Glare*—The impact will be less than significant.
- *Biological Resources*—There are no sensitive plant or wildlife species identified on site. The burrowing owl visits seasonally; therefore the impact will not be significant. The project will not impact the Los Cerritos Wetlands because of separation caused by a major arterial (Studebaker).
- *Land Use*—The project is compatible with the City's Strategic 2010 plan.

Ms. White concluded her presentation by stated that Home Depot (the company) has shown support of the Long Beach community in the past by partnering Team Depot with the local Habitat for Humanity program, and with the Associate Volunteer Program. Home Depot has also partnered with the Long Beach Parks and Recreation Department and Los Angeles Angels to sponsor the local Little Leagues. Ms. White can be contacted at (949)717-7941, and at Marice@govsol.com. The meeting was then opened for comments and questions.

Ms. White was asked if the proposed store was more like Expo, rather than Home Depot. She responded that it was a “hybrid” Home Depot that does not cater exclusively to the contractor clientele; a good example is the Brea location. She then stated that she would be willing to arrange a bus tour for those that were interested in seeing a model. Next, she was asked why the leverage was placed on the applicant to get CalTrans to coordinate traffic lighting when Long Beach Traffic Department seemed to envision this task as an impossible feat? She responded that private industry has more time to dedicate to this task, and are willing to pay for whatever they want to achieve. The next person stated that the Traffic Study gives the impression that due to the bridges, it is difficult to make any significant changes to the traffic flow (i.e. you cannot

widen bridges). Ms. White said that CalTrans does not monitor the signals, they simply allow PCH traffic to free flow. While the bridge connections aspect may not change, there is room for improvement in terms of lighting signals. She went on to say that even 1% of improvement is a huge amount of change in traffic. CalTrans is in support of traffic improvements, but the bigger issue is who will pay for them. Projects as small as the proposed one are typically not on the CalTrans capital improvements list. Next, Ms. White was asked why there is an EIR, and yet other problems projected by the applicant that had not been included. She responded that this is the purpose of the comments period, and oftentimes these documents are very conservative in how the review is prepared. Angela Reynolds stepped in and said that all assumptions made by the City are conservative because we don't want to be overly lenient. Ms. Reynolds was then asked who determines the levels of significance and/or insignificance. She responded that there are thresholds for each category of concern. These thresholds are found within the CEQA guidelines, and the City may occasionally add to it. Based on the studies, these impacts can be either at threshold, below, or above it (which would be where mitigation requirements are introduced). The next question was whether comments would be grouped in the EIR. Ms. Reynolds said that comments are typically grouped together when there are lots of them. However, the City prefers to make sure that each comment is individually responded to, and then group them in the EIR based on topic. Next, it was requested that any comments regarding the Los Cerritos Wetlands be grouped separately. Ms. Reynolds obliged. Next, someone commented that the cut-thru traffic conclusion was questionable; the same thing was said before and University Park Estates residents had to fix the problem. In response, Ms. Reynolds pointed out that we did not do a qualitative traffic study, only quantitative. If someone wants to dispute this conclusion, we will be happy to address it in the final EIR. Marice White was then asked if the EIR includes any mention of the proposed Seaport Marina project. She responded that it did not, only because the NOP was prepared before that project was a consideration. Next, Ms. White was asked to clarify the location of the pathways, and if there was any thought made to extending the trail south onto 2nd Street. Since Island Village is completely isolated, it would be nice to include pathways so that the residents would have pedestrian access into the community. Ms. White said that there would be a sidewalk added to the bridge on Loynes, and there was still the vacant property that may be used to add to the landscaping requirement. She also pointed out that if more of the retail space was removed the landscaping requirement would be met. However, if that is taken out the walking paths and pedestrian-friendly features would also be removed. Lastly, Ms. White was told that the corner of 7th Street and Studebaker is already impacted; and now that the nearby church has acquired more land traffic on Sundays would only get worse. She responded by saying that the peak times for Home Depot are from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The discussion closed with Ric Trent thanking the guest speakers, and reminding the group that they are coming to the end of their "wish list." He went on to say that if there is anything else that the group would like to know about, or any other areas of interest, please bring it up at next month's meeting.

Other Issues

- Next meeting Date is June 8, 2005.
- Possible Guests—
 - Department of Water and Power
 - General Plan Update discussion, focusing on this area

Meeting Adjourned at 7:48 p.m.